

In theaters

“Cloud Atlas”



By Macario Mora



I haven't read David Mitchell's 2004 novel "Cloud Atlas." However, from what I've heard it wouldn't have left me any less dumbfounded than I felt after watching the film adaptation. Directors the Wachowski brothers (The Matrix) or rather siblings Lana and Andy teamed up with Tom Tykwer and tried mightily to bring this ambitious project to the big screen. Ultimately, it's epically confusing and boring rather than the transcended film it tried desperately to be.

The premise of the film is rather profound and a question historians and philosophers have pondered through the millennia – does what we do here today have a lasting effect on tomorrow, 10, 50 or hundreds of years from now? Unfortunately, the question is probably best left for intellectuals and not film producers because it simply doesn't translate to the big screen.

"Cloud Atlas" stars Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, Jim Broadbent, Hugo Weaving, Jim Sturgess and Bae Doo Na who all play multiple roles throughout the film, which is really just a mishmash of short stories loosely tied together by a birth mark shaped like a comet. Here in lies the problem with this film.

The half dozen stories span many centuries beginning with a lawyer's diary of his travel across the Atlantic in the 19th Century; letters written by a young musician who composes "Cloud Atlas," which hauntingly plays throughout the film, to his forbidden love. There's also a journalist working for a rag in 1970s San Francisco attempting to expose a nuclear power company; a hilarious story about a contemporary publisher tricked by his brother into imprisoning himself in a nursing home; and a clone's narrative of slavery in futuristic "Neo-Seoul." Last, and certainly least, there's a ridiculous and hard to comprehend story about a post-apocalyptic Earth featuring Tom Hanks talking in Pigeon parading through a primitive Hawaii.

Some of the stories are exceptionally entertaining whereas others are drawn out and boring, and one story is absolutely absurd – hint, post-apocalyptic Earth. The difference in quality and interest in the stories really makes the film distracting. Furthermore, the directors bounce back and forth between the stories with no real rhyme or reason making it incredibly difficult to follow. Even more absurd, the Wachowski siblings and Tykwer decide to use the same actors in every story altering between different races and genders. Tom Hanks and his cohorts are probably still trying to wash away the awful makeup, which at times seemed to add inches to their faces – it was simply distracting.

Ultimately, the movie was watchable, but incredibly long and at times confusing. In a split second the viewer goes from laughing at a group of seniors attempting at break out of a nursing home to confusingly trying to understand Tom Hanks speak Pigeon to a futuristic Halle Berry. There was no consistency. Visually it's what you'd expect from a 2012 picture trying desperately to portray an epic story.

There were some existential questions raised, though lost in the difficult narrative and sequence. Themes of humanity, love and the like tried to rise above the fray, but were ultimately drowned out by the nonsensical makeup, sequence and inconsistency. I would certainly put this one in the Netflix queue and wait for a lazy Sunday.

"Cloud Atlas" is rated R for violence, language, sexuality/nudity and some drug use.